

CLAIMS

1. An ink jet printhead comprising:
 - a plurality of nozzles; and5 at least one respective heater element corresponding to each nozzle, wherein
 - each heater element is in the form of a suspended beam, arranged for being suspended over at least a portion of a bubble forming liquid so as to be in thermal contact therewith, and
 - each heater element is configured to heat at least part of the bubble forming liquid to a temperature above its boiling point to form a gas bubble therein, thereby to cause the ejection of a drop of an ejectable liquid through the nozzle corresponding to that heater element.
- 10 2. The printhead of claim 1 being configured to support the bubble forming liquid in thermal contact with each said heater element, and to support the ejectable liquid adjacent each nozzle.
- 15 3. The printhead of claim 1 wherein the bubble forming liquid and the ejectable liquid are of a common body of liquid.
- 20 4. The printhead of claim 1 being configured to print on a page and to be a page-width printhead.
- 25 5. The printhead of claim 1 wherein each heater element is in the form of a cantilever beam.
- 30 6. The printhead of claim 1 wherein each heater element is configured such that an actuation energy of less than 500 nanojoules (nJ) is required to be applied to that heater element to heat that heater element sufficiently to form a said bubble in the bubble forming liquid thereby to cause the ejection of a said drop.
7. The printhead of claim 1 configured to receive a supply of the ejectable liquid at an ambient temperature, wherein each heater element is configured such that the energy

required to be applied thereto to heat said part to cause the ejection of a said drop is less than the energy required to heat a volume of said ejectable liquid equal to the volume of the said drop, from a temperature equal to said ambient temperature to said boiling point.

- 5 8. The printhead of claim 1 comprising a substrate having a substrate surface, wherein each nozzle has a nozzle aperture opening through the substrate surface, and wherein the areal density of the nozzles relative to the substrate surface exceeds 10,000 nozzles per square cm of substrate surface.
- 10 9. The printhead of claim 1 wherein each heater element has two opposite sides and is configured such that a said gas bubble formed by that heater element is formed at both of said sides of that heater element.
- 15 10. The printhead of claim 1 wherein the bubble which each element is configured to form is collapsible and has a point of collapse, and wherein each heater element is configured such that the point of collapse of a bubble formed thereby is spaced from that heater element.
- 20 11. The printhead of claim 1 comprising a structure that is formed by chemical vapor deposition (CVD), the nozzles being incorporated on the structure.
- 25 12. The printhead of claim 1 comprising a structure which is less than 10 microns thick, the nozzles being incorporated on the structure.
- 30 13. The printhead of claim 1 comprising a plurality of nozzle chambers each corresponding to a respective nozzle, and a plurality of said heater elements being disposed within each chamber, the heater elements within each chamber being formed on different respective layers to one another.
- 35 14. The printhead of claim 1 wherein each heater element is formed of solid material more than 90% of which, by atomic proportion, is constituted by at least one periodic element having an atomic number below 50.

15. The printhead of claim 1 wherein each heater element includes solid material and is configured for a mass of less than 10 nanograms of the solid material of that heater element to be heated to a temperature above said boiling point thereby to heat said part of the bubble forming liquid to a temperature above said boiling point to cause the ejection of a said drop.

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16. The printhead of claim 1 wherein each heater element is substantially covered by a conformal protective coating, the coating of each heater element having been applied substantially to all sides of the heater element simultaneously such that the coating is seamless.

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17. A printer system incorporating a printhead, the printhead comprising:
a plurality of nozzles; and
at least one respective heater element corresponding to each nozzle, wherein
each heater element is in the form of a suspended beam, arranged for
15 being suspended over at least a portion of a bubble forming liquid so as to be
in thermal contact therewith, and
each heater element is configured to heat at least part of the bubble
forming liquid to a temperature above its boiling point to form a gas bubble
therein, thereby to cause the ejection of a drop of an ejectable liquid through
20 the nozzle corresponding to that heater element.

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18. The system of claim 17 being configured to support the bubble forming liquid in thermal contact with each said heater element, and to support the ejectable liquid adjacent each nozzle.

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19. The system of claim 17 wherein the bubble forming liquid and the ejectable liquid are of a common body of liquid.

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20. The system of claim 17 being configured to print on a page and to be a page-width printhead.

21. The system of claim 17 wherein each heater element is in the form of a cantilever beam.

22. The system of claim 17 wherein each heater element is configured such that an actuation energy of less than 500 nanojoules (nJ) is required to be applied to that heater element to heat that heater element sufficiently to form a said bubble in the bubble forming liquid thereby to cause the ejection of a said drop.

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23. The system of claim 17, wherein the printhead is configured to receive a supply of the ejectable liquid at an ambient temperature, and wherein each heater element is configured such that the energy required to be applied thereto to heat said part to cause the ejection of a said drop is less than the energy required to heat a volume of said ejectable liquid equal to the volume of the said drop, from a temperature equal to said ambient temperature to said boiling point.

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24. The system of claim 17 comprising a substrate having a substrate surface, wherein each nozzle has a nozzle aperture opening through the substrate surface, and wherein the areal density of the nozzles relative to the substrate surface exceeds 10,000 nozzles per square cm of substrate surface.

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25. The system of claim 17 wherein each heater element has two opposite sides and is configured such that a said gas bubble formed by that heater element is formed at both of said sides of that heater element.

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26. The system of claim 17 wherein the bubble which each element is configured to form is collapsible and has a point of collapse, and wherein each heater element is configured such that the point of collapse of a bubble formed thereby is spaced from that heater element.

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27. The system of claim 17 comprising a structure that is formed by chemical vapor deposition (CVD), the nozzles being incorporated on the structure.

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28. The system of claim 17 comprising a structure which is less than 10 microns thick, the nozzles being incorporated on the structure.

29. The system of claim 17 comprising a plurality of nozzle chambers each corresponding to a respective nozzle, and a plurality of said heater elements being disposed within each chamber, the heater elements within each chamber being formed on different respective layers to one another.

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30. The system of claim 17 wherein each heater element is formed of solid material more than 90% of which, by atomic proportion, is constituted by at least one periodic element having an atomic number below 50.

10 31. The system of claim 17 wherein each heater element includes solid material and is configured for a mass of less than 10 nanograms of the solid material of that heater element to be heated to a temperature above said boiling point thereby to heat said part of the bubble forming liquid to a temperature above said boiling point to cause the ejection of a said drop.

15 32. The system of claim 17 wherein each heater element is substantially covered by a conformal protective coating, the coating of each heater element having been applied substantially to all sides of the heater element simultaneously such that the coating is seamless.

20 33. A method of ejecting a drop of an ejectable liquid from a printhead, the printhead comprising a plurality of nozzles and at least one respective heater element corresponding to each nozzle, the method comprising the steps of:

providing the printhead wherein each heater element is in the form of a suspended beam;

25 disposing a bubble forming liquid such that the heater elements are positioned above, and in thermal contact with, at least a portion of the bubble forming liquid;

heating at least one heater element corresponding to a said nozzle so as to heat at least some of said portion of the bubble forming liquid which is in thermal contact with the at least one heated heater element to a temperature above the boiling point of the bubble forming liquid;

30 generating a gas bubble in the bubble forming liquid by said step of heating; and causing the drop of ejectable liquid to be ejected through the nozzle corresponding to the at least one heated heater element by said step of generating a gas bubble.

34. The method of claim 33 comprising, before said step of heating, the steps of:
disposing the bubble forming liquid in thermal contact with the heater elements; and
disposing the ejectable liquid adjacent the nozzles.

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35. The method of claim 33 wherein the bubble forming liquid and the ejectable liquid
are of a common body of liquid.

36. The method of claim 33 wherein the step of disposing the bubble forming liquid
10 comprises disposing the bubble forming liquid so that it substantially surrounds the heater
elements.

37. The method of claim 33 wherein said step of heating at least one heater element is
effected by applying an actuation energy of less than 500nJ to each such heater element.

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38. The method of claim 33, comprising, prior to the step of heating at least one heater
element, the step of receiving a supply of the ejectable liquid, at an ambient temperature, to
the printhead, wherein the step of heating is effected by applying heat energy to each such
heater element, wherein said applied heat energy is less than the energy required to heat a
20 volume of said ejectable liquid equal to the volume of said drop, from a temperature equal
to said ambient temperature to said boiling point.

39. The method of claim 33 wherein, in said step of providing the printhead, the
printhead includes a substrate on which said nozzles are disposed, the substrate having a
25 substrate surface and the areal density of the nozzles relative to the substrate surface
exceeding 10,000 nozzles per square cm of substrate surface.

40. The method of claim 33 wherein each heater element has two opposite sides and
wherein, in the step of generating a gas bubble, the bubble is generated at both of said sides
30 of each heated heater element.

41. The method of claim 33 wherein, in the step of generating a gas bubble, the generated bubble is collapsible and has a point of collapse, and is generated such that the point of collapse is spaced from the at least one heated heater element.

5 42. The method of claim 33 wherein the step of providing the printhead includes forming a structure by chemical vapor deposition (CVD), the structure incorporating the nozzles thereon.

10 43. The method of claim 33 wherein, in the step of providing the printhead, the printhead has a structure which is less than 10 microns thick and which incorporates said nozzles thereon.

15 44. The method of claim 33 wherein, in the step of providing the printhead, the printhead has a plurality of nozzle chambers each chamber corresponding to a respective nozzle and wherein the step of providing the printhead further includes forming a plurality of said heater elements in each chamber, such that the heater elements in each chamber are formed on different respective layers to one another.

20 45. The method of claim 33 wherein, in the step of providing the printhead, each heater element is formed of solid material more than 90% of which, by atomic proportion, is constituted by at least one periodic element having an atomic number below 50.

25 46. The method of claim 33 wherein, in the step of providing the printhead, each heater element includes solid material and wherein the step of heating at least one heater element comprises heating a mass of less than 10 nanograms of the solid material of each such heater element to a temperature above said boiling point.

30 47. The method of claim 33 wherein the step of providing the printhead includes applying to each heater element, substantially to all sides thereof simultaneously, a conformal protective coating such that the coating is seamless.